

Understanding Outreach and Outreach in a Scientific Context

Outreach is the provision of health-related information and services to a target population that has traditionally been underserved and uninsured. Outreach is a strategy for bringing services to where a group resides and works. Outreach is not a new strategy. It is a strategy that follows early public health edicts of health professionals canvassing a community and offering health information and treatment to members of that community. The success of outreach has been associated with the hiring and training of individuals who are indigenous to the community. By using indigenous workers, a program can receive instant credibility with and access to a community that has traditionally been reluctant to receive information from outsiders. This is especially true for the pandemics of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C affecting injection drug users. From a research perspective, having access to substance users has created an enormous opportunity for behavioral scientists to observe drug users' culture and social norms, enabling social scientists to collect quantitative and ethnographic data.

I. RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

Research protocols are established rules and procedures that must be adhered to while collecting valid data for social science research.

Knowledge

- Understand the importance of following protocols to best serve clients and not compromise the scientific integrity of the work;
- Understand basic research terminology related to outreach activities (such as baseline, followup, data, instrumentation, analysis, and intervention).

Skills

- Be able to explain to clients and participants in simple language what research is being conducted and why;
- Successfully implement a standardized protocol, including risk assessment, intervention, and followup;
- Conduct data entry.

Attitudes

- Appreciate the link between collecting accurate information and being able to learn how best to serve populations at risk.

II. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE THEORIES

Behavioral science theories are used to help predict and explain people's actions and the motivations underlying those actions. There are numerous theories, such as the Health Belief Model, Social Learning Theory, and the Stages of Change Model. These theories are often used in research to help ask questions, design interventions, frame the research activities being conducted, and evaluate their outcome measures.

Knowledge

- Understand why theories are useful in research;
- Understand several behavioral science theories, such as the Health Belief Model, the Social Learning Theory, and the Stages of Change Model.

Skills

- Be able to apply theory to outreach work.

Attitudes

- Appreciate the way in which behavioral theory can assist the outreach worker in better conducting his or her work.